

Prior to examining this application, kindly amend the application as follows:

IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1, 13-28, 36, 38, 39, 42-47, 49, and 51 without prejudice.

Please amend claims 29-31, 33-35, 37, 40, 41, 48, 50, and 52 as follows:*

29. (Amended) An isolated transgenic plant cell comprising a nucleic acid molecule stably integrated into the genome, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is:
- (a) a nucleic acid molecule encoding a polypeptide having the enzymatic activity of an RNA-directed RNA polymerase (RdRP) or encoding an enzymatically active fragment thereof, selected from the group consisting of:
- (1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;
 - (2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;
 - (3) a nucleic acid molecule that specifically hybridizes to a complementary strand of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (1) or (2) in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_r 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C for 4-24 hours;

* An "Appendix of Amendments" is enclosed herewith showing the amendments to the claims. In the Appendix, additions are underscored and deletions are bracketed.

~~(4) a nucleic acid molecule that has a sequence identity of at least 60% to the nucleic acid molecule of (1) or (2); and~~

~~(5) a nucleic acid molecule, the nucleotide sequence of which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to a nucleotide sequence of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (3) or (4);~~

~~wherein said nucleic acid molecule is linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription and/or expression of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells; and/or~~

~~(b) a template nucleic acid molecule coding for an RNA molecule that is capable of serving as a template for RNA-directed RNA synthesis, wherein said nucleic acid molecule is linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells.~~

30. (Amended) A transgenic plant comprising the plant cell of any one of claims 29 or 65-71.

31. (Amended) An isolated transgenic plant cell which contains stably integrated into the genome a nucleic acid molecule selected from the group consisting of:

(1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;

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- (2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;
 - (3) a nucleic acid molecule that specifically hybridizes to a complementary strand of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (1) or (2) in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_w 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C for 4-24 hours;
 - (4) a nucleic acid molecule that has a sequence identity of at least 60% to the nucleic acid molecule of (1) or (2);
 - (5) a nucleic acid molecule, the nucleotide sequence of which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to a nucleotide sequence of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (3) or (4); and
 - (6) a nucleic acid molecule comprising at least 15 contiguous nucleotides of any of (1) - (5) or a complementary strand thereof;
- wherein said nucleic acid molecule is linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription and/or expression of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells; and wherein the presence, transcription and/or expression of the nucleic acid molecule leads to reduction of the synthesis of a polypeptide having RNA-directed RNA polymerase (RdRP) activity in the cell.

33. (Amended) A transgenic plant comprising the plant cell according to claim 31 or 32.

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34. (Amended) A cultured plant tissue comprising the plant cell according to any one of claims 29, 31 or 32.

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35. (Amended) Harvestable parts of a plant comprising the plant cell according to any one of claims 29, 31 or 32.

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37. (Amended) Propagation material of a plant comprising the plant cell according to any one of claims 29, 31 or 32.

40. (Amended) A method for inhibiting RNA-directed RNA synthesis in a plant cell comprising introducing into said plant cell a nucleic acid molecule of at least 15 nucleotides that specifically hybridizes in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_r 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C for 4-24 hours to a nucleic acid molecule selected from the group consisting of:

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(1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;

(2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;

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- (3) a nucleic acid molecule that specifically hybridizes to a complementary strand of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (1) or (2) in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_r 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C for 4-24 hours;
- (4) a nucleic acid molecule that has a sequence identity of at least 60% to the nucleic acid molecule of (1) or (2);
- (5) a nucleic acid molecule, the nucleotide sequence of which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to a nucleotide sequence of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (3) or (4); and
- (6) a nucleic acid molecule that is a complementary strand of (1)-(5).

41. (Amended) The method of claim 40, 62 or 63, wherein said method ensures stable heterologous gene expression in transgenic plants.

48. (Amended) The transgenic plant cell according to claim 29, wherein said nucleic acid molecule is heterologous to the transgenic plant cell.

50. (Amended) A method for inhibiting expression of a gene in a plant cell, comprising stably integrating into the genome a nucleic acid molecule selected from group the group consisting of:

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- (1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;
 - (2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;
 - (3) a nucleic acid molecule that specifically hybridizes to a complementary strand of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (1) or (2) in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_r 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C for 4-24 hours;
 - (4) a nucleic acid molecule that has a sequence identity of at least 60% to the nucleic acid molecule of (1) or (2);
 - (5) a nucleic acid molecule, the nucleotide sequence of which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to a nucleotide sequence of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (3) or (4); and
 - (6) a nucleic acid molecule coding for an RNA molecule that is capable of serving as a template for RNA-directed RNA synthesis wherein said nucleic acid molecule is linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells;

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wherein said nucleic acid molecule may be optionally linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription and/or expression of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells.

52. (Amended) A method to inhibit RNA-directed RNA polymerase activity in a plant cell, comprising the step of producing a knock-out mutant in an RdRP gene, wherein said RdRP gene comprises a nucleic acid molecule selected from the group consisting of:

(1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2;

(2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;

(3) a nucleic acid molecule that specifically hybridizes to a complementary strand of the nucleic acid molecule as defined

in (1) or (2) in 0.25 M NaHPO₄ pH 7.2; 0.25 M NaCl, 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 5-20% (w/v) polyethylene glycol (M_r 6-7.5x10³) at 42° C. for 4-24 hours;

(4) a nucleic acid molecule that has a sequence identity of at least 60% to the nucleic acid molecule of (1) or (2); and

(5) a nucleic acid molecule, the nucleotide sequence of which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to a nucleotide sequence of the nucleic acid molecule as defined in (3) or (4).

62. (Added) The method according to claim 40, wherein said nucleic acid molecule is contained in a vector and wherein said nucleic acid molecule is optionally linked to regulatory elements allowing transcription and/or expression of said nucleic acid molecule in plant cells.

Please add new claims 62-71 as follows:

63. (New) The method according to claim 40 or 62, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is (1) a nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2; or (2) a nucleic acid molecule comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

64. (Added) The transgenic plant cell according to claim 29, wherein the nucleic acid molecule has a sequence identity of at least 90% to (1) the nucleic acid molecule coding for a polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2; or (2) the nucleic acid molecule sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

65. (Added) The transgenic plant cell according to claim 29, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is DNA.

66. (Added) The transgenic plant cell according to claim 65, wherein the DNA is cDNA or genomic DNA.

67. (Added) The transgenic plant cell according to claim 29, wherein the nucleic acid molecule is RNA.